

# Celebrating the Lord's *Spring Feasts*<sup>1</sup>

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## *Passover – Unleavened Bread – Firstfruits*

In God's instructions to His people concerning His Feasts, He called them "holy convocations." The Hebrew word means "*a rehearsal*." They are also called: "The Feasts of the LORD," meaning *to move in a sacred procession, to observe a festival*.<sup>2</sup> Under the New Covenant in Christ, we don't celebrate these Festivals legalistically, or only just as Biblical Holidays. In Exodus 23:15, God made a reference to them as *appointed times*, which in the Hebrew understanding is: *divine appointments*. So they are like appointments that God has put on His Calendar to have a *special* meeting with us. God said, *Every year on this date, I want to meet with you, because there are some special ways I want to bless you*. They're not just for the Jewish people anymore—as God's people, we get to be included now too! Zechariah 14 reveals that they are for "all the nations," and that there are promised blessings for the *Gentiles* who observe the Feasts! We must remember that our Lord—the Man, Jesus Christ—is Jewish—and He will be forever. They are celebrations of *our LORD*. (See Handout: "Celebrating the Feasts of the Lord" for more information.)

The Feasts of the LORD are prophetic picture symbols of the steps man must take to be reconciled to God. They are the complete Plan of Redemption that He put into seven easy to understand steps. They are easy enough that a child can understand the steps, while at the same time, the truths they contained can be expanded upon until we have the entire message of the Bible! The entire Gospel message of redemption, salvation, sanctification, atonement, and glorification; the covenants, and the history of Israel; eschatology of the marriage of the Lamb, the Bride of Christ, and Jesus the Messiah are all foreshadowed in the seven main Festivals. Seven is the Biblical number of perfection and completion.

The first three Appointed Times occur in the spring. The entire salvation message plays out during this Festival, and what a beautiful story it is. Jesus was killed on **Passover** as the perfect Lamb of God, sacrificed to take away the sins of the world, so eternal death could pass over us. He was buried during **Unleavened Bread**, without the "yeast" of sin in His life. Once we accept His Blood for salvation, we must also die to our flesh, and cooperate with the Lord as He helps us remove the leaven of sin from our lives. Jesus rose from the dead on **Firstfruits** and became the Firstfruits of the resurrection. This confirmed the promise of our future resurrection where we will get to spend eternity with Him. "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept" (1 Corinthians 15:20).<sup>3</sup>

Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Firstfruits are celebrated over a one-week period. Many refer to this week as the week of Passover or just the week of Unleavened Bread. God instructed His people in Leviticus 23 to celebrate Passover on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month on the original Hebrew calendar (Nisan); the seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread begins on the 15<sup>th</sup>; and Firstfruits is always held on the Sunday following Passover (instructions are found in Exodus 12:1-51; 13:3-10; 23:14-19; 34:18-26; Leviticus 23:4-14; Numbers 9:1-14; 28:16-25; Deuteronomy 16:1-6).

### **The Feast of Passover:**

Passover is a celebration of deliverance. The Israelites celebrated their deliverance from death and the land of bondage in Egypt. It was prophetic of the Messiah coming to deliver God's people from spiritual death, and bondage to the enemy and sin. The Israelites were to mark their house with the blood of the sacrificed Passover lamb. God's children now mark their body (*their spiritual house*) with the Blood of Jesus (*our Passover Lamb of God*). Jesus was actually sacrificed on *the very day of Passover*! It is the first Feast Day in the Lord's amazing layout of the steps of redemption. It occurs in the early spring, the time of the rebirth of the creation after a dead winter season. It was also the time of the birth of the nation of Israel. The Children of Israel had been enslaved in Egypt for over 400 years, and they could not get themselves free from

Pharaoh's hold (who is a symbol of satan). God saw their oppression by the enemy and heard their cries for help (Exodus 3:7-10). He sent Moses (a symbol of the Redeemer) to deliver them out of the hand of the enemy. At the end of the many signs and wonders God performed in the plagues of Egypt, He told them to sacrifice a lamb and use the blood to mark the doorways of their homes. It was actually on the tenth day of the month that the head of each family was to select from the flock a male lamb of the first year, without blemish. They applied the blood of the slain lamb to their doorway by faith, and as God's judgment and penalty for sin passed through the land, He extended His grace and mercy upon all whose house was marked by the blood of the Passover lamb. They were delivered from the wages of their sins, which is death, while at the same time the Egyptians received death because they were not under the blood of the lamb. This is when the Israelites were free to leave Egypt—their entire group of people together—to journey to their own land. Spiritually, we have to be redeemed out of the hand of the enemy (satan), and delivered from his oppression and slavery to sin. None of us can leave the kingdom of darkness or free ourselves from slavery to our powerful enemies of this world, the flesh, and the devil that hold us in sin—and the penalty of our sins—which is death (Romans 6:23). It is only by being marked by the Blood of the our Passover Lamb—the Lord Jesus Christ—who in His death and resurrection defeated death and satan paying the penalty of our sins for us (Colossians 2:12-15). The Israelites, by faith, trusted in the blood of the lamb to save them, and by our faith in the Blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God, we are saved. The Israelites were commanded to celebrate their deliverance by the blood of the lamb that first Passover, and we now celebrate the triumph of our Redemption made by Jesus Christ, our Passover Lamb of God. He became our ultimate Passover sacrifice, the perfect “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

### **The Feast of Unleavened Bread:**

Jesus was buried during Unleavened Bread, without the “yeast” of sin in His life. Once we accept His Blood for salvation, we are to also die to our flesh, and remove the leaven of sin and hypocrisy from our lives. “Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, as you are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:6-8). Nowhere in the Bible are we told to stop celebrating the Feasts of the Lord. This passage actually says that because Christ was sacrificed as our Passover Lamb, we are to keep celebrating it, but in a new way with this new understanding. In God's instructions, they were to remove all of the “leaven” from their houses, which was an object lesson for removing sin from our lives, which may be where we get the idea of “spring cleaning.” It's also a good opportunity to get the children involved, using it to teach them the spiritual significance of removing the physical leaven with it being an outward sign of an inward reality. It's like a season of Spiritual Spring Cleaning in our lives. The apostle Paul wrote in Colossians 2:11: “In whom (*Jesus*) also you are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.”

### **The Feast of Firstfruits:**

On the Day of Firstfruits, bundles of “standing sheaves” (called an omer) were presented to the priests, who “lifted” them up to the LORD as an act of dedicating the spring harvest to Him. This firstfruits offering took place on the day after the weekly Sabbath that occurs during the week of Unleavened Bread (Firstfruits is always on a “Sunday”). Firstfruits is a picture of Jesus' resurrection. After “three days and three nights” in the grave, Jesus rose from the dead on the very day of Firstfruits, and became to our Heavenly Father an offering of the “Firstfruits of the resurrection.” “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming” (1 Corinthians 15:20-23). Jesus' resurrection is

confirmation of the promise of the future resurrection of all Believers (John 5:28-29). Firstfruits is a wonderful time to celebrate the Risen King! Take time to offer Thanksgiving and Praise to God for the promise of the Harvest, for raising Jesus from the dead, and for the hope of the resurrection yet to come.

Every plague leading up to the Israelites' being freed from slavery in Egypt was a direct strike against each of the Egyptian pagan gods. The Lord wants us to continue telling the story, so that we can have strength in knowing that our God is the God above all other "gods" and no other "god" can compare to Him. He is the One Who will fight for us and there is nothing He cannot handle! We also see that when He got to His final plague it took faith, action and obedience from His people to be spared. They had to trust what He said and be obedient by applying the blood of a perfect, unblemished lamb to the lintel and doorposts of their homes in order to spare their firstborn. This is the same for us today; we have a free will choice to have faith to listen and obey God, to accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, and to apply His blood to our hearts and minds, so that we too can die to our flesh daily, having no leaven of malice or wickedness, but only the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. It's through faith in Him and accepting His free gift that saves us and sets us free from bondage; and teaches us how to stay free from that bondage through His Word and by His Spirit. He wants us to know that He is with us, He is faithful and He is the one Who can and will part the seas for us!

### **God's Incredible Timing:**

God's calendar is based on a lunar system. The new moon (which starts new months) happens on many different days of the week. If you count forward to the evening of the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the month to start Passover, sometimes it will land on a Sunday, sometimes on a Wednesday, sometimes on a Friday, etc... But the Feast of Firstfruits is *always* on the "day after the Sabbath" during Unleavened Bread, which is a Sunday. So some years, there might be a week between Passover and FirstFruits, other years it might be the next day. But the year Jesus died—there were *three days between Passover and Firstfruits*. And this is the beauty of it. The sign of the Messiah was that it would be the same as the sign of Jonah, that He would be dead for 3 days and 3 nights, just as Jonah was in the fish for 3 days and 3 nights (Matthew 12:40). Only our Father could have timed everything in prophecy to converge in just one special year, so that Jesus was the perfect fulfillment of everything! But there's even more... Jesus died at the end of the 14th day of the first month, right as all the Passover lambs were being killed for the Passover meal that evening. He was "slain" the afternoon of the 14<sup>th</sup> as our Passover Lamb! That would have been on a Wednesday afternoon that year. They hurried to get His body off the cross before sunset, as the Torah requires, and then—*can you imagine??*—they all went to their own homes and had a Passover lamb dinner with their families...all the while knowing that Jesus had just been slain for their sins. It would have been horrific, and yet amazing. Then Thursday was the "first day of Unleavened Bread," on which they rested and all stores were closed, because it was a special festival Sabbath God built into some of the Feasts. On Friday, the women went out to buy spices for Jesus' tomb, because they wouldn't have had a chance to do that yet. They also would have rushed around to prepare for the regular weekly Sabbath. On Saturday, they rested again, and Pilate was warned that the disciples might try to sneak away Jesus' body, because His prophecy was that well known. Then... sometime after dark on Saturday night and before light on Sunday morning (all of which was now the first day of the week—Sunday—and *the Feast of FirstFruits*)... HE AROSE! <sup>4</sup>

Matthew 28:1-6 says: "In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week (Sunday), came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulcher. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said to the women, Fear not: for I know that you seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay." Jesus' resurrection was on the first day of the week, not because God changed

the Sabbath, but because the Firstfruits offering was presented on the day after the Sabbath. It was prophesied from the Books of Moses to the last book of the Bible that Jesus would be resurrected as the firstfruits from the dead and that His death and resurrection would release us from our sins (see Matthew 12:39-40; John 2:18-19; 12:23-24; Acts 10:39-41; 26:22-23; 1 Corinthians 15:20-22; Revelation 1:4-5).

### “Rehearsal” of Things to Come:

If “holy convocations” are “a rehearsal,” according to the Hebrew definition we saw earlier, what are the Spring Feasts a rehearsal for? The Apostle Paul wrote in Colossians 2:16-17: “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a *holyday*, or of *the new moon*, or of the *Sabbath days*: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.” Paul wrote this AFTER Jesus had already come, died, and rose again, so those special celebration days were still being observed and were *not* only a shadow of His first coming. They are also a shadow ***of things still yet to come!*** This is one reason why we should still be observing them. The Apostle Paul obviously was; and so was the early Church for hundreds of years.

So, the Spring Feasts must hold prophetic aspects as well. God has given us the observance of them as part of the preparation for “*things yet to come*” when the Lord returns. Jesus told His disciples that the Passover feast would not be completely fulfilled until we are all in the Kingdom of God: “And He said to them, With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer: For I say to you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God” (Luke 22:15-16 – see verses 29-30).

The week of Unleavened Bread symbolizing the removal of sin from our lives is a picture of the process God takes us through as we are becoming more Christ-like. “He that saith he abides in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked” (1 John 2:6), but we all know we will never be completely sinless until we are in our resurrected bodies. “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in Him purifies himself, even as He is pure” (1 John 3:2-3). (See also 1 Colossians 3:1-25.)

Thinking of the Feast of Firstfruits, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 speaks of a future resurrection: “For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” 1 Corinthians 15:20-22 says: “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by Man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at His coming” (See verses 20-44.) Firstfruits is also called the “Feast of Weeks,” because that is when you begin counting 50 days to Pentecost (when the Holy Spirit fell on the disciples as they waited in the Upper Room)...

\*To understand what may look like differences in the Scriptural accounts in timing of events at Christ’s crucifixion, see the following articles (and remember that there absolutely are no contradictions in the Bible, even if our Americanized, Roman timing-keeping minds cannot understand something):

<http://www.increasinglearning.com/blog/bible-contradiction-did-jesus-die-before-or-after-the-passover>

<http://www.increasinglearning.com/blog/bible-contradiction-when-was-jesus-crucified>

<https://bible.org/question/was-last-supper-passover-seder>

\*Handout written with information from:

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<sup>1</sup> [www.thebiblicalcalendar.org](http://www.thebiblicalcalendar.org)

<sup>2</sup> *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1982, #2287.

<sup>3</sup> [www.thebiblicalcalendar.org](http://www.thebiblicalcalendar.org)

<sup>4</sup> Anne Elliott: [www.anneelliott.com](http://www.anneelliott.com) and [www.homeschoolingtorah.com](http://www.homeschoolingtorah.com)